

Butler, John, (1731-1800) catholic bishop of Cork, was the third son of Edmond Butler, 18th Lord Dunboyne, of Grange, co. Tipperary and Anne Grace of Shanganagh, co. Tipperary. The Grange Butlers, a landed family, were part of the network of Butler families and dependents which covered much of South Leinster and Munster. A relative was archbishop of Cashel. His older brothers Pierce and Edmond were already soldiering in France when John decided on a career in the church. Travelling to Rome via Cadiz, Genoa and Leghorn he took up residence in the Irish College in the Via degli Ibernesei. During his student years he attended lectures at *Propaganda Fide* and, in an obscure incident, lost his left eye. He was ordained priest on 20 December 1755 in the Lateran Basilica and appears to have completed his doctoral studies before returning to Ireland in 1758. On his way home he was delivered over to a justice of the peace at Whitehaven in Cumberland but was not detained. He returned to his native diocese of Cashel and was appointed parish priest of Ardmayle in 1759. He also took up duty as bishop's secretary and was made an archdeacon. During the following four years he reestablished himself in the Butler social network. When the diocese of Cork fell vacant, Butler, supported by local bishops, emerged as a strong candidate. He was nominated bishop by pope Clement XIII on 16 April 1763 and his consecration in June elicited a praise poem in Gaelic by Eadbhárd de Nógla. He took up residence at Monkstown, outside Cork city, had a city house at Pope's Quay and was parish priest of St. Mary's. The beginning of his episcopal ministry coincided with the gradual emergence of the catholic community from civil and economic disadvantage. The Catholic Church underwent reorganisation, following the Tridentine model, as it adapted to more tolerant conditions. Butler was heavily involved in this process and, in the first ten years of his episcopate, three new chapels were built in Cork. He was, however, careful not to alienate the protestant establishment, with whom he had many contacts. When the pioneering local educationalist Nano Nagle engaged to introduce the Ursuline Sisters to the city Butler delayed their arrival until 1771 so as not to offend protestant sensibilities. His episcopate witnessed widespread urban and rural agitation which often turned into violence. Butler condemned the coopers' riots in Cork in an 'Exhortation' published in the *Hibernian Chronicle* (2 July 1766). Rural Whiteboy anger in Munster was sometimes directed against catholic clergy over stole fees and other dues. In Butler's *Statuta Synodalia pro Dioecesi Corcagiensi* (1768) association with the Whiteboys was made a reserved sin. He subscribed to the Test Act of 1774 and gave strong financial support to the Catholic Committee. In 1786 the title and estate of Lord Dunboyne fell to him. As a

catholic priest he had taken a vow of celibacy but, if he did not produce an heir, the direct line in the lordship of Dunboyne was in danger of extinction. He resigned his see in December, petitioned the pope for a dispensation from celibacy and married Maria Butler of Wilford, co. Tipperary. His request to the pope was rejected and he took the oaths of allegiance, abjuration and supremacy in Clonmel on 19 August 1787. This is the sole authenticated instance of the apostasy of a member of the catholic Irish hierarchy. He moved to the family seat in Dunboyne, co. Meath shortly afterwards. A daughter was born to the couple but died young. They later moved to Lesson Street in Dublin. His attitude towards the rebellion of 1798 is unknown though the village of Dunboyne was burned in the disturbances, including the catholic chapel, later rebuilt on land granted by the Butler family. In 1800, worn down by age and illness he addressed a letter of repentance to the pope and made his will. He was confessed by the Augustinian preacher, Dr William Gahan and died on 7 May 1800. He was interred in the Augustinian Friary in Fethard, co. Tipperary. Litigation over his will, by which he left his Meath estates to the Royal Catholic College at Maynooth, commenced almost immediately. A compromise between the college and the Butler family was reached in 1808 which permitted the setting up of the Dunboyne Establishment at Maynooth College to maintain and endow selected scholars for additional studies.